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Supporting your SEN best practice

Welcome to Headteacher Update’s 2018 SEN supplement. All teachers are teachers of pupils with SEN and this publication is aimed at offering advice and support to professionals working in mainstream schools across the country.

Throughout the year, SEN best practice advice features regularly within the pages of Headteacher Update – offering whole-school guidance to school leaders and classroom support and advice for teachers.

This supplement continues what is one of our most important areas of focus. Today, the range of SEN that mainstream schools support is wider than ever.

While in this short supplement we could never touch upon the entire gamut of specific needs that teachers are likely to encounter, we have set out to offer general best practice advice for teaching staff to help ensure proper inclusion in the classroom.

For school leaders, we have focused on wider issues of safeguarding and meeting the requirements of the SEN Code of Practice. There is also a whole-school case study of effective SENCO practice.

Finally, we have included one specific SEN focus – speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This has become an increasingly critical area in recent years and we include a case study and advice on identifying and supporting needs.

I hope you find the range of articles in this supplement useful.

• Pete Henshaw is the editor of Headteacher Update.

Meeting the diverse needs of learners

Welcome to this Headteacher Update SEN supplement. At Pearson, we support education professionals working with all ages in mainstream and special education settings who may need additional learning support.

Our assessment tools are used by specialist teachers, SENCOs, learning support tutors, schools and educational psychologists, to help profile students’ strengths and weaknesses, to identify areas to investigate further, and to chart progress and development.

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Further information
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Excellence in SEN: Contents

• Teaching SEN pupils in the mainstream classroom
  Pages 4-5
• SLCN: Pendle Primary Academy
  Page 6
• Creating the right classroom environment for SEN
  Pages 8-9
• SEN under the new safeguarding statutory guidance
  Page 11
• The SEN Code of Practice: Common problems & solutions
  Pages 12-13
• Whole-school SEN & SENCO best practice: A case study
  Page 15

Further information
• www.pearson.com/uk/educators/special-educational-needs-disability.html
All teachers are teachers of pupils with SEN. Expert Caroline Lindsay offers some basic practical advice on teaching approaches to ensure the best outcomes for our SEN pupils.

Teachers are superheroes. We assess, plan, teach and review a diverse population of children who have a vast range of needs and it is our responsibility to ensure that they all learn and all make progress.

Meeting the needs of all pupils in any educational setting is a challenge and meeting the needs of those with SEN is even more so. They are often our most challenging pupils to engage and can be the most demanding on our time, both in the planning and delivery stages of our lessons. So, how can we be quality first teachers to all pupils, all of the time?

First, I think it is important to remember that we are all teachers of pupils with SEN regardless of our training and specialisms. We have a duty to become the problem-solver in overcoming the barriers children face in their education. I have worked as secondary teacher in a mainstream setting and I currently work as special needs teacher in a special school and I have found some of the following strategies useful to support SEN learners:

**Have high expectations**

Positivity breeds positivity, and no-one needs this more than our SEN pupils. These pupils will often find day-to-day school life more challenging than their mainstream peers and as progress is often (but not always) in small steps, success can be easy to miss. Look for and celebrate achievement and have high expectations of your SEN pupils. Having a SEN or a disability can have a labelling effect but it shouldn’t limit our expectations on what they are capable of achieving. If we opt for a “can-do” and “the sky is limit” attitude, our pupils are more likely to succeed.

**Appropriately challenge pupils**

We have all heard pupils say “I’m rubbish at this” or just fail to even try the activity that we have spent hours planning. There is no denying that this is demoralising, but we have to remember that all pupils can achieve and be engaged with their learning. In my experience, some pupils won’t even try to complete an activity if they don’t think they can do it, because it might simply be too hard.

If we pitch our activities at the right level, pupils are less likely to fear failure because they will actually feel that they can to do it. The outcome of appropriately challenging our pupils can be improved behaviour, pupil engagement and academic progress. This sounds very simplistic but we have to remember that no-one is ever unteachable and by differentiating our lessons appropriately and getting into a cycle of achievement, the pupil is then more likely to engage, take small risks and in the long term, complete work with limited support or even independently.

**Personalise their learning**

In mainstream school settings we may only see certain pupils once or twice a week and that can prove to be a challenge. We may become reliant on information provided by the SENCO and possibly our teaching assistants (if we are lucky enough to have one). For example, if we are faced with a challenging pupil with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, how do we get them to engage in the lesson without being a disruptive influence? What you need is the “hook”. The only way to find this is to take the time to get to know your challenging SEN pupils. I appreciate that this can be
Challenging during a very busy day, but try to spare 10 minutes to find them and get to know them out of a classroom context. Find out a little about their life, what they find important and what motivates them. This knowledge can then provide you with the hook, pupils have an incentive to work and once the incentive is there, progress will be made.

Reduce vocabulary and provide absolute clarity
Quite often we think that the more detailed explanations we provide, the more pupils will understand and learn, however this isn’t the case for all pupils, particularly those with SEN. I like to think of this tip as “trimming the fat”. When teaching, think about exactly what you want your pupils to learn and teach them only that.

When we were younger, we might have heard our mothers say: “Do one thing at a time and things are less likely to go wrong.” This is most definitely the case here. This strategy can work at all levels: decide what you want the pupils to learn – skills, knowledge or both – and then strip back your vocabulary. Try to limit your sentences to short focused learning points using key vocabulary. This doesn’t necessarily make the content or subject matter any easier (it could if you wanted it to but remember we have high expectations), but it can make it more accessible for all pupils as the explanation and learning becomes clearer. No more “I give up, I just don’t get it…”

It is also important to remember to never assume that pupils know what the core vocabulary means, so as you use your key vocabulary always provide an explanation.

Clarity with tasks and written resources
Write written tasks or resources in pupil-friendly language. Limit the amount of text on the page, streamlining it to the core pieces of information. Add pictures and diagrams; most pupils will naturally look at the visual aid before reading the written text. Use success criteria and provide examples of answers or outcomes so the pupils know exactly how to complete the task.

These instructions or steps to success can then enable them to work more independently, as the activity would be clear and appropriately challenging. A good measure for whether you have resourced the activity successfully would be if a teaching assistant or non-specialist subject teacher were to come into your lesson late but still know exactly what the task was and how the pupils should achieve it successfully by reading the resource sheet.

Super differentiate your lessons
Don’t be scared to have more than one activity going on at the same time. Pupils don’t all need to do the same activity at the same time and at the same pace. We can teach smaller group activities effectively if we resource the tasks appropriately. Remember that clarity, personalisation and appropriate challenge is the way forward for effective learning.

If you are concerned about keeping track of all the pupils’ differing progress, ask them to target set at the end of each lesson, in preparation for the next lesson. At the start of the next lesson, ask them to share their target before they begin.

Use your teaching assistant effectively
The role of teaching assistants is endless and very much personalised to your setting and pupils, but ultimately they support learning within the classroom. We often use teaching assistants to run interventions, help pupils to focus and stay on task, provide the key learning points for our pupils with a range of learning disabilities – the list really does go on. There are, however, a few things to be aware of:

1. Teaching assistants can have a labelling effect on pupils and can cause a segregation between the pupil and their peers. Provide opportunities for the pupil to complete some activities independently so they can socially interact in the classroom setting.
2. Be aware of learned helplessness. When a pupil works consistently with a teaching assistant in most of their lessons, they often begin to think that they can’t achieve (or complete the work) if the teaching assistant isn’t there. It is good practice to ask your teaching assistant to step away and allow pupils to achieve without and challenge. When a pupil achieves by themselves, the accomplishment they feel is more powerful.
3. Be aware of over-relying on your teaching assistant. Remember, learning still has to take place even if your teaching assistant is running late or doesn’t turn up at all. It is common for both the teacher and pupil to become over-reliant on teaching assistants to help support learning. Remember, success can be achieved even in a busy mixed ability class with careful planning and differentiating accordingly.
4. Teaching assistants don’t have mind-reading skills so it is really important to communicate how you would like them to support learning effectively. Instructions could be written for the teaching assistant on a differentiated resource sheet or discussed and agreed during a meeting prior to the lesson.
5. Remember, it is okay to use your teaching assistant in a different or creative way – we don’t always have to do what’s always been done.

“Don’t be scared to have more than one activity going on at the same time. Pupils don’t all need to do the same activity at the same time and at the same pace.”

Conclusion
There is a common misconception that planning to meet the needs of pupils with SEN adds significantly to the ever-increasing workload of a teacher but it simply doesn’t have to. As “quality first” teachers creating resources and planning in this way, reducing our vocabulary to the key learning points, and generating a positive “can-do” environment benefits all pupils. This level of clarity makes learning clear and with appropriate differentiation and challenge, all pupils will make progress.

Remember, all pupils can achieve, we just have to make what we do achievable. The small changes we make to our practice can make a really big difference – not only to those with SEN, but to all of our pupils.

- Caroline Lindsay is a vice-principal and Specialist Leader of Education for SEND at Ash Field Academy in Leicester.
A commitment to SLCN

Pendle Primary Academy recently won a Shine a Light Award for its commitment to pupils’ communication skills. Simon Thompson explains their approach.

A follow up review 10 years after The Bercow Report – the review of services for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) – recently found that just 26 per cent of children with SLCN make the expected progress in the EYFS. Additionally, regional differences in access to support can lead to a postcode lottery for children getting the support they need.

So, what can primary schools do to ensure students receive essential support to help with their speech, learning and communication needs? Speech and language skills are the building blocks to all learning, from maths to PE, history to science, so it is essential that children are able to communicate with others and feel comfortable when doing so.

As with all areas of teaching and learning, there is a tailored approach. Our speech and language therapists use the results of the assessment to plan and tailor the support for each child that needs it. This could be one-to-one or small group sessions with her and a teaching assistant, or larger group sessions with other children in a similar situation. We also liaise with NHS therapists to ensure we have a plan in place for any children due to start in Reception who are on their caseloads. This ensures they are appropriately and actively supported as soon as they start full-time education. Other support agencies like Place2Be, a charity providing emotional support to children in schools, has also played a valuable role in a number of cases.

Language is part of all learning

Every new school year, a new set of children join our school with some degree of SLCN. So we knew that we had to establish speech, language and communication at the heart of everything we did in school. Examples of this include:

- Using signs and symbols to support children’s communication, ensuring they are able to make their wishes/feelings known.
- Using visual timetables and now and next boards to support children’s learning.
- Providing a language-rich environment where children have access to communication-friendly spaces, indoors and outdoors. This includes a quiet space in the playground for children to sit, talk and read books.
- Starting every lesson with a discussion. This can be a “What if...?” question giving children 10 minutes to discuss and present their thoughts on a topical issue, or a maths chat revolving around a question on the board that children discuss with peers, for example.
- Enrichment activities including visits to the library and outdoor residentials. These experiences allow them to learn by doing, seeing, hearing and smelling, which supports language and literacy skills.
- Opening up the school library at lunchtime, allowing children to play games, solve word puzzles, read books/newspapers or talk.
- Children dine in a family-style environment at lunchtime, talking to staff and other pupils.

Teamwork

Improving children’s speech, language and communication skills isn’t just the responsibility of our speech and language therapist. It is something that can only be achieved by a number of groups working together:

- We work closely with other local schools and nurseries to ensure as many children as possible within the community benefit from the expertise of our speech and language therapist. We have a strong relationship with our main feeder nursery, running practical activities (such as the helicopter stories approach) to improve the language skills of the children who join us in EYFS.
- We provide regular training, advice and support to staff and parents. Staff and Lancashire Adult Learning run family activity sessions where parents can come and learn alongside their children.
- We liaise with the NHS speech and language service to discuss children who have a specific language difficulty, including stuttering and verbal dyspraxia.
- When necessary, we involve Place2Be, our school counselling service, to support children who need to improve their confidence or emotional wellbeing.
- We work in partnership with other healthcare professionals, including a school nurse, paediatrician and occupational therapists.
- We have excellent transition systems in place to ensure all children have a smooth transition to secondary school. This is achieved by working collaboratively with all educational professionals involved as well as parents.
- We hold an annual gala day for children to share their learning with their families.

There is no doubt that our investment in a speech and language therapist has had a dramatic impact on our students, reduced the NHS caseload, and cut down on the number of appointments parents need to attend. Our students have become increasingly confident communicators and the school is now achieving above national averages in writing and maths. We are also rolling out our speech, language and communication model to the other primary schools within the Pendle Education Trust.

Walking the talk: Pupils at Pendle Primary Academy receive a wide range of support to develop speech, language and communication skills

Our school has an excellent transition system to support children with SLCN into mainstream education. Our speech and language therapist has had a dramatic impact on our students, reduced the NHS caseload, and cut down on the number of appointments parents need to attend. Our students have become increasingly confident communicators and the school is now achieving above national averages in writing and maths.

We are also rolling out our speech, language and communication model to the other primary schools within the Pendle Education Trust.

Shine a Light

Pendle Primary Academy won Primary School of the Year Award at 2018 Shine a Light Awards, a national awards scheme that celebrates innovative work and excellent practice in supporting children’s communication development, run by learning company Pearson in partnership with The Communication Trust.


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- Youth Justice of the Year Award
- SLCN Innovation Award
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication Award
- Communication Champion Award
- Outstanding Achievement Award
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Nominations close 20TH DECEMBER 2019!
An effective learning environment is key to success for all pupils – especially those with SEN. **Matt Bromley** discusses some basic tenets of good practice to help support SEN students in the mainstream classroom.

_Teachers are required – by the Teachers’ Standards (2011) and the SEND Code of Practice (2014) – to ensure all their pupils can access learning, and this – it is made explicitly clear – could include making adaptations to their learning environment.

So what kinds of learning environment are most conducive to the success of pupils with SEN? Let us take a look at the physical environment, the emotional environment, and the instructional environment...

**The physical environment**
The best learning environments have a range of physical resources such as personalised dictionaries, writing frames, lists of sentence starters, lists of linking words, mini-whiteboards and coloured pens, pastel coloured paper and notebooks, aide memoires to support individual learning activities, and tailored hand-outs to support specific tasks.

Pupils who are susceptible to visual stress are best supported by coloured overlays, cream paper for hand-outs and exercise books, pastel or cream backgrounds on computer screens and PowerPoint presentations, a font size no smaller than 12 point for paper and 28 point for PowerPoint, texts in a sans serif font such as Arial, Verdana, Tahoma and Comic Sans, left-justified text, and the use of bold to emphasise text (but the avoidance of italics, underlining and capitals).

Classroom displays work best for pupils with SEN when they are informative, interactive and relevant, are uncluttered so that key information can quickly and easily be found, and can be seen from every position in the classroom. Displays also work best when there is a good use of colour, and when they contain key words that are explicitly taught to and understood by all pupils and then frequently referenced in lessons.

Classrooms that work best for pupils with SEND are also:
1. Quiet and distraction-free.
2. Fitted with good lighting, heating and ventilation.
3. Stocked with the requisite resources and equipment, all within easy reach of pupils and adults, including for example a whiteboard, flip chart and writing resources (but at the same time a clutter-free classroom).

Most of the features I list above are related to the physical environment and yet a classroom is more than just the bricks and mortar of the built environment. A positive learning environment is also about how the teacher teaches and about the culture or ethos they create.

**The emotional environment**
The SEND Code of Practice says that “special educational provision is underpinned by high-quality teaching and is compromised by anything less”.

Providing an inclusive learning environment whereby pupils’ needs are met without drawing attention to their difficulties, therefore, is crucial because this will maximise their learning potential but limit any feelings they may have of embarrassment and frustration. As such, let’s now turn our attentions to some of the emotional features of a positive SEN learning environment.

An effective learning environment is, to my mind, one in which, emotionally, all pupils:
- Feel welcomed.
- Feel valued.
- Are enthusiastic about learning.
- Are engaged in their learning.
- Are eager to experiment.
- Feel rewarded for their hard work.

Behind all these characteristics is a simple, though oxymoronic, aim: to ensure pupils with SEN are comfortable with discomfort.
In other words, we want pupils with SEN to know that the work they will be asked to do in our classrooms will be tough, that they will be challenged with hard work and made to think hard. To put it bluntly, having a learning difficulty or disability should not negate the need for challenge or excuse laziness. We want pupils with SEN to know that there will be no hiding place in our classrooms; they must ask and answer questions and attempt everything we ask of them.

We differentiate by the amount and nature of the support we provide to pupils, but not by task, and we certainly do not lower our expectations for pupils with SEN. We have high aspirations for every pupil in our class and support every pupil to succeed.

However, in so doing, we want them to feel safe and protected, we want them to be eager to face challenge, and to willingly attempt hard work because they know we have strung a safety net beneath them: they might fall but we will catch them.

We want them to know that taking risks and making mistakes is not just accepted in our classrooms but is positively and proactively welcomed as an essential part of the learning process. Indeed, the only people who don’t make mistakes either don’t get any better at anything or have reached the point of automaticity – they have fully mastered something and so can now do it through habit. Our pupils are not at the point of automaticity and so must make mistakes if they are to get better at anything. If they don’t make mistakes, they cannot receive feedback; if they don’t receive feedback, they will not know how to improve; if they don’t know how to improve, they simply won’t improve.

There are many ways of achieving a positive emotional environment in which pupils with SEN are comfortable with discomfort: some are simple, some more complex...

For example, a teacher could establish a habit of greeting pupils at the classroom door at the start of every lesson, smiling as pupils enter and welcoming at least some of them by name.

"Our pupils are not at the point of automaticity and so must make mistakes if they are to get better at anything."

A teacher could ensure they are on time and have a lesson planned and ready to go, and that the lesson begins promptly.

They could model enthusiasm by constantly articulating – through their words and actions – their joy at teaching these pupils and at teaching their subject. Sometimes a little over-acting goes a long way. It is better to be considered the kooky, eccentric teacher who’s truly, madly, deeply in love with science, say, than the boring, said one who never cracks a smile and only perseveres for the pension.

Next, a teacher could establish a growth mindset culture in which effort is prized over attainment, hard work is rewarded, and mistakes are shared and celebrated.

The teaching environment

So far we have considered the physical and emotional features of a positive learning environment for pupils with SEN. Now let us turn our attentions to how the teacher teaches – in particular, we will explore some specific strategies for supporting pupils with memory difficulties, teaching spelling, teaching reading, teaching writing, and teaching through intervention.

Supporting SEN pupils with memory difficulties

When supporting pupils with memory difficulties, we could:

- Revisit previous learning at the beginning of the lesson, allowing pupils to recall and make associations with new learning.
- Give an overview of the lesson so the pupils can see the outcome and make sense of the content.
- Revisit learning at regular intervals throughout the lesson.
- “Chunk” new information and regularly check understanding.
- Use a step-by-step approach to completing any task with regular checkpoints for monitoring progress and giving feedback.
- When giving instructions, limit the number, repeat them and provide notes and a checklist.
- Use simple, concise sentences when giving direct instruction.
- Consider the pace of delivery – speak more slowly if necessary.
- Use songs and rhyme to aid memorisation.
- Allow “wait time” for pupils to process information before articulating an answer.
- Allow pupils to work collaboratively. Ensure that the tasks are relevant to the learning and eliminate those that will interfere with that learning, such as copying from the board or writing the date and title.
- When pupils are on task, avoid interrupting their learning.
- At the end of the lesson, summarise the learning and say what the next lesson will be about. Paint the big picture for pupils, showing how each lesson fits in and builds upon the last.

Supporting SEN pupils with spelling

When teaching spelling, we could:

- Provide subject-specific key words in handouts.
- Encourage pupils to take risks with their spelling, suggesting that they underline these words.
- Encourage a metacognitive approach by asking pupils to analyse their spelling mistakes and identify the learning required.

Supporting SEN pupils with reading

When teaching reading, we could:

- Ensure that books are at the right level of difficulty for pupils.
- Use audiobooks when appropriate.
- Explicitly teach reading skills, such as skimming, scanning and close reading.
- Encourage pupils to condense and make sense of what they read, for example by making mind maps and drawing diagrams and flow charts.
- Explicitly teach the key – and unfamiliar – vocabulary pupils will encounter in the text before they start reading.
- Encourage pupils to question the writer’s techniques and intentions, and consider their own views and experiences in relation to the text.
- Instil in pupils a desire to read by providing reading materials that are of particularly personal interest to them.

Supporting SEN pupils with writing

When teaching writing, we could:

- Check pupils’ understanding of the task before they begin writing.
- Use ICT to improve written outcomes, for example voice recognition software or mind-mapping software.
- Provide examples and model good practice.
- Break down a writing task into manageable chunks.
- Teach, model and encourage pupils to plan.
- Give specific feedback at each stage so pupils know what to repeat or improve.
- Provide a mix of written and verbal feedback.
- Improve proof-reading by building in proof-reading time in lessons, using a buddy system, teaching and modelling strategies, providing proof-reading checklists, encouraging pupils to read work aloud, and leaving “thinking time” between writing and proof-reading.

Supporting SEN pupils through intervention

Sometimes, despite quality first teaching, it may be necessary for pupils to attend additional intervention sessions outside of class. When teaching through additional interventions, in order to ensure the best outcomes, we could:

- Ensure the lessons are structured, cumulative and multi-sensory, and that the physical environment is suitable.
- Where possible, let the pupil govern the pace of delivery.
- Ensure the specific needs of the pupil are met (as identified by their classroom teacher) rather than provide “off the peg” sessions.
- Ensure the knowledge and skills taught in the intervention session are transferred back to the classroom by communicating effectively – before and after the intervention sessions take place – with the classroom teacher.
- Ensure progress is reviewed at regular intervals – not just evaluated once the intervention has ended – and that tracking data is used to inform the future direction of the intervention (it may need stopping or tweaking).
- Gather pupil voice feedback at regular intervals to assess their (hopefully burgeoning) levels of motivation, confidence and self-empowerment.

Matt Bromley is an education journalist and author with 18 years’ experience in teaching and leadership. Visit www.bromleyeducation.co.uk
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Protecting SEN students

Updated safeguarding advice reminds us of some of the particular challenges that pupils with SEN can face. Suzanne O’Connell advises

Schools returned in September to the implementation of the new safeguarding advice. The updated Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) was published by the Department for Education (DfE) in May. It is statutory and comes into force in September 2018.

The guidance includes children with SEN on the list of those who are more vulnerable. Not only are SEN pupils more likely to experience abuse, but they are less likely to have the abuse identified. KCSIE reminds us of the additional barriers that can exist when recognising abuse and neglect for SEN pupils. These can include:

• Assuming that possible indicators of abuse such as behaviour, mood and injury relate to the child’s SEN and not investigating.
• They are more prone to peer group isolation than other children.
• Some behaviours such as bullying can have a greater impact on them, but they may still not show any sign of this.
• There are communication barriers and difficulties in overcoming these. KCSIE recommends that schools should consider extra pastoral support for SEN pupils.

Attributing behaviour

A key feature of any safeguarding guidance is how to ensure that staff are alert to the signs of abuse. Changes in behaviour, mood swings, aggression, reluctance to attend school, general unhappiness or anxiety and dips in attainment can all be indications that abuse is taking place.

However, there can be a danger that the changes in behaviour of SEN pupils are simply attributed to the needs that the child has. This might particularly be the case where the child has a behavioural need. Behaviour that might have been investigated further for one child might be put down to SEN for another.

A child who is behaving aggressively towards their parents might be doing so because they are trying to curb his behaviour, but it can also be as a reaction to abusive and difficult relationships. It can be difficult for staff to be able to identify clearly what the real cause of the behaviour is and more time should be taken to consider these cases. We might explain a child being withdrawn as a reaction to medication, rather than looking further into the story. Self-harm and eating disorders might be put down to anxiety over academic pressure rather than attributed to bullying or other safeguarding concerns.

Peer group isolation

Some reports of abuse will come from friends of the pupil. They may have noticed, for example, that a friend isn’t eating with them at lunchtime and is losing weight. They can be the ones who are witnesses to bullying and are able to support a friend in dealing with it and reporting it.

This support network is not always available to the pupil with SEN. Changes in social habits will not be evident if other pupils keep their distance anyway. Their isolation can make it more difficult to share problems/find solutions.

Problems with bullying

Pupils with SEN can be particularly vulnerable to bullying. They can also find it harder to report it. They may lack the confidence or peer group support that it needs and, in some cases they may not even recognise that bullying is taking place.

Pupils with SEN may be less aware than their peers of the structures to deal with it, and those with health or visible medical conditions can be more likely to become targets.

Pupils with behavioural difficulties can have that behaviour triggered by classmates for entertainment. They may then find that they are the ones who are punished. It can be difficult for members of staff to spot the subtle ways in which a capable bully can touch the nerve that leads to chaos in the classroom.

Communication barriers

Underlying many of the additional challenges referred to here are problems with communication. For some pupils with the most severe SEN this can be the result of an inability to speak out at all. For others, limited communication skills can lead to pupils with SEN preferring not to draw any additional attention to themselves. They might not have the words to use to describe what is happening to them and in some cases, the abuse might have continued for so long that they do not see it as something they can or should report. Schools should try and identify ways in which pupils with communication difficulties can be heard.

The use of ‘reasonable force’

The new KCSIE guidance acknowledges that there can be circumstances in which it is appropriate for staff to use reasonable force to safeguard pupils. This refers to actions involving some physical contact or restraint and includes guiding a child by the arm, breaking up a fight or restraining a pupil to prevent violence or injury.

The word “reasonable” means “using no more force than is needed”. It might include standing between pupils, blocking a pupil’s path or active physical contact such as leading a pupil by the arm. The DfE advises against schools adopting a “no contact” policy, suggesting that this can leave staff unable to fully support and protect. Instead KCSIE advises schools to: “Adopt sensible policies, which allow and support their staff to make appropriate physical contact. The decision on whether or not to use reasonable force to control or restrain a child is down to the professional judgement of the staff concerned and should always depend on individual circumstances.”

What schools should do

The new advice means that safeguarding policies and practice need review. All staff must be familiar with Part One of the KCSIE guidance. If training for staff hasn’t already been carried out then this should be a priority along with any changes to documentation and school policies.

Additional consideration may need to be given to how pupils with SEN are protected. For example, the guidance emphasises the importance of developing a culture where children are listened to. This can be more of a challenge where children have difficulties in communicating and expressing themselves.

Additional solutions may be needed, such as providing them with a key worker – not necessarily a teacher – who has chance to really get to know the child and provide them with the time to express themselves, in whatever form is appropriate.

Measures should also be taken to ensure that pupils with SEN understand some of the safeguarding messages that others might take for granted. Do they know how they can approach if they have a problem? Is written literature that pupils are signposted to accessible to them? Can they access the content of PSHE lessons and the school’s acceptable use policy, for example.

It is important that all teachers are aware of the most vulnerable groups and the issues that make it more difficult to recognise when abuse is taking place.

Remember, it can be hard to find the time to properly investigate why a child with ADHD lost control, but schools must nonetheless provide the support for teachers to be able to do so.

It might also be a good time to look at policies related to safeguarding. The school’s behaviour policy could also be reviewed and the approach to restraint reconsidered. Have a look at the SEN policy and check the references to safeguarding.

Further information

• Use of Reasonable Force in Schools, DfE, July 2013: http://bit.ly/2zMT7g7
• Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, DfE, January 2015: http://bit.ly/27yy0p

Suzanne O’Connell is a freelance education writer and a former school leader.
The SEND Code of Practice has been a huge challenge for schools and teaching staff. Daniel Sobel considers some of the key problems – and offers some solutions for schools.

Setting the scene

Before I turn to the critique, it is important to say that England is way ahead of nearly every other country when it comes to SEN. Furthermore, the professionals who work in SEN as SENCOs, teaching assistants and the whole gamut of roles in and out of schools often give way beyond that which they are paid for. There are examples of outstanding practice in many schools that I visit.

Local authorities have changed

The climate, landscape and practical functioning of SEN have changed for the majority of schools because local authorities have changed. Very rarely are local authorities seen by schools now as supportive, engaged and collaborative.

There are many stories of local authorities declaring that there is no more funding for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), or where there is a backlog of six months for processing referrals, or where applications are refused over minor clerical errors. None of these things are compliant with either the letter or the spirit of the CoP, but then we all know that funding has been cut. The idea of emphasising greater collaboration between education, health and social care services in the CoP was universally applauded, but in reality, it is harder than ever. Is this all down to funding?

Recategorisation and financial chaos

After the CoP had been law for just a year, 200,000 pupils who were previously identified as having SEN had still not been transferred from Statements to EHCPs or SEN Support.

Many of those students were in receipt of allocated funding and consequently specified support and those two issues did not evolve in step with the recategorisation. What resulted was a catastrophe for many students, for school budgets and for the stress levels of our SENCOs. This problem continues with an unreasonable over-reliance on an ill-trained and ill-equipped teacher workforce to pick up the pieces.

One of the many ramifications is the misdiagnosis of learning difficulties and barriers to learning stemming from parental pressure (however understandable), which can lead to some children being misidentified as having an SEN and consequently others who genuinely need help missing out because resources are limited. The most common frustration I get from heads is that students who clearly need EHCPs are missing out.

SEN support for schools

SEN support for schools has always been in short supply, but now more than ever. It was always hard to get enough speech and language therapy but it has reached “scarce” levels across the country. Specialist teacher services have been cut significantly. Education psychologists are not in-step with the needs of schools. Their reports are often unhelpful for SENCOs or classroom teachers and have little impact on the actual support for a student in school.

Spirit of the SEN information report

The spirit of the SEN information report was based on the Lamb Inquiry of 2009, which demonstrated that students perform well at school to the extent that their parent/guardians are engaged. The problem I have seen, with a handful of exceptions, is that the SEN information report tends to be a tick-box exercise full of dry, difficult-to-digest information. Therefore this requirement has led to very little benefit for parents. It’s a nice idea, but in practice I haven’t seen much evidence of it working. Have parents become more or better involved in the last four years? It is certainly higher up the agenda and most heads are quick to tell me of the wonderful work they are doing, but the views of parents are not the same.

The paperwork

The EHCP process has not led to a cut in the time a SENCO spends on paperwork. Paperwork is the least useful thing a SENCO does and by far the most expensive admin role in school. The CoP was an opportunity to revisit the administration of SEN in general, but nothing has improved.

The ‘graduated’ approach

An aspect of the CoP that I was most excited about was: “Where a pupil is identified as having SEN, schools should take action to remove barriers to learning and put effective special educational provision in place. This SEN support should take the form of a four-part cycle (assess, plan, do and review).”

“Through this, earlier decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised with a growing understanding of the learner’s needs and what would most support them in making good progress and securing good outcomes. This approach will allow your school to manage expectations among parents and learners, through regular improvements and adaptations.”

In reality, this hasn’t happened well. Nearly all the schools I know have needed some support in how to implement this process and clarifying what the three Waves look like in their setting (Wave 1: Inclusive quality first teaching. Wave 2: Additional interventions. Wave 3: Personalised interventions). How many teachers could tell you what Wave 2 implies for their classroom?
There are many simple and easy solutions. SEN will only succeed in a school setting if it is cheap, easy, simple and doable, trackable and demonstrable.

Parents
Parental engagement will never work for the hard-to-reach and the apparently belligerent unless you invest in the positive bank: get a teaching assistant to call your most challenging parents once or twice a week with positive news about how well their child is doing.

When it comes to a challenging issue make sure the parent is fully appraised of the situation by the teaching assistant. If you can, hold the meeting in a café or their house. Or make your office look like a home lounge. Focus on making the parent feeling positive and at ease. This drip-drip relationship is a million times better than big full formal tick-box meetings.

The 3 Waves Model
The CoP wants teachers to be practising the three Waves in their classes. Do an extended piece of work around the Waves model by discussing this first with your senior leadership team and then supporting your teachers to understand what you are trying to achieve and why. Don’t think about additional interventions until you have the differentiation and pre and over-learning right. See my previous articles:


Exclusions
Reflect on the most common SEN behind exclusions and focus your staff on those issues. Nearly always it boils down to one of three: Hyperactivity, ADD and Attachment. I have written about each of these:


Early identification
Early identification and appropriate action is key, but the real issue is how you are identifying and taking action. Nearly all SEN issues are evident at EYFS and yet there is a distinct lack investment of money and effort at this stage. Our EYFS auxiliary staff are the least equipped and trained and so this is an area every primary head should look at. The CoP assumes early identification and support in class. See my article: Tackling hunger and engaging parents, Headteacher Update, March 2016: http://bit.ly/2LGs8yJ

SEN information report
Write your SEN information report with some parents. Get them to advise you and even attest to the usefulness and accessibility. Think about putting most of that information into an engaging video for people to watch rather than just a long document. If it ain’t used, then what’s the point other than a tick-box exercise? This will hopefully produce an SEN information report that is in the spirit of the CoP.

SEN consultants
Be sceptical about the wild west of SEN consultants that have arisen to provide support to schools in place of local authorities. Ask them who they get observed and moderated by.

Collaboration
Collaborate. Federal with your local heads, decide on your procedures and tell your local authority what you are doing for SEN. Collectives of heads are far more powerful than you may realise. This can cover issues around more effective liaison with agencies and efficient paperwork for SEN.

Celebrate
Celebrate SEN with your teachers – award, reward and praise. A celebratory and positive culture with your staff goes so much further than any legislation. Openly celebrate the work of our most challenged students as well.

Daniel Sobel is founder of Inclusion Expert. You can find all his articles for Headteacher Update on our website via http://bit.ly/20D7hQ5
Further information
Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years, Department for Education, January 2015: http://bit.ly/27yye0P

SEN CODE OF PRACTICE
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It takes time and financial resourcing to make sure that SEN pupils get the support they need. **Suzanne O’Connell** looks at how one school ensures effective whole-school SEN practice.

At St Mary Magdalen’s Catholic Primary in Richmond there are 270 children on roll. It is a one-form entry school with approximately 10 per cent of the children having SEN. At their last Ofsted inspection they were judged to be outstanding and inspectors said that “disabled pupils and those with SEN achieve exceptionally well.”

Headteacher Helen Frostick recognises the huge contribution that her SENCO, Wendy Burns, makes. The two work together, with governors, teachers and support staff to ensure that each pupil, whatever their needs, is carefully tracked, supported and that progress is made.

There is a clear whole-school strategy to help steer SEN, backed by the budget. For example, the decision was made to appoint a second SENCO – an additional financial commitment which gives Ms Burns a degree of flexibility in her role.

**Encouraging independence – staff**

For children with SEND to make the best progress, Ms Burns recognises how important it is that both staff and pupil independence is encouraged. When it comes to staff, her role is to act as advisor and consultant rather than taking responsibility away from the teachers.

“It’s the individual teachers who are working most of the time with the children with SEN and so they need to be the ones who are skilled in what they are doing,” explained Ms Burns. As SENCO, Ms Burns has an important staff training role. She ensures, too, that interventions are tied to pupil progress.

In order to ensure that the staff do have the skills they need, Ms Frostick puts a lot of her budget into staff training: “I probably spend too much on this,” she said, “but it’s vital that they have the development they need and we select it from whichever source seems best.”

There is a whole-school drive on provision mapping as part of performance management and all staff have had to provide their own maps. They are actively asked for their suggestions and finding solutions is everyone’s responsibility. There is plenty of provision available too including literacy support, maths programmes and a homework club.

“This is by invitation only,” Ms Burns explained. “We want to ensure that those who really need additional time and space to do their homework attend and it isn’t used for childcare or because their friends are doing it.”

**Encouraging independence – pupils**

Ms Burns is a keen advocate of ensuring that pupils do not develop “learned helplessness”. This means that teaching assistants are allocated to the classrooms, but are not specifically tied to individuals. There are two assessment periods and staff are moved accordingly. Ms Frostick doesn’t want children to be over-dependent. The lessons are pitched high and the children work alongside peers who act as models for them too.

“There is a danger if a pupil works too frequently with one member of staff that they come to expect that everything is explained additionally to them,” said Ms Burns. “It’s a fine balance between ensuring that extra help is given where it’s needed and children becoming reliant. This model isn’t replicated in secondary schools so we are doing our children a disservice if we don’t help them become accustomed to being independent.”

Teaching assistants are assigned to classes according to the level of need in each class. It is expected that they do some specific work with the children, but also there is a general requirement that they work with different groups. Ms Burns also delivers short programmes herself focused on very specific targets.

**Building the network**

Although the role of the class teacher is paramount, they very much recognise the need to build up a network of strategies and support. “We have an open culture here,” explained Ms Burns. “Staff know that they can come for help. However, my first question will usually be, ‘what have you tried already to support this child’. I’ll expect to see from their provision planning that they have already tried a number of approaches – SEN is still their responsibility.”

The school also recognises just how many aspects of education have an impact on pupils with SEN. “For example,” Ms Burns continued, “I am very keen to flag up attendance issues. How can pupils really benefit from the interventions we provide if they’re not here?”

Another key aspect of SENCO provision is the SENCO’s room. It’s been furnished to create a down-to-earth hub with a lending library. This is where parents can come and meet with Ms Burns and between them they can share what’s working and what’s not working so well. Ms Burns recognises how important it is that any strategies are backed up at home and this includes during the summer break. She has plenty of resources to offer to parents, too.

It is not only face-to-face. Ms Burns spends a lot of time on the telephone ensuring that parents are kept up-to-date with what’s happening and understand how they can help too: “It’s important that I am accessible,” she added.

**Knowing the children**

“We look at each individual child and look for why they are not progressing,” Ms Burns continued. “If it is something environmental then we look to see if we can make changes to that environment. Each strategy and approach is tailored to the individual.”

Ms Burns spends a lot of her time teaching. Her involvement in and out of the classroom means that she knows each individual child well and is able to speak knowledgeably with other professionals: “This actually saves me time. Rather than having to ask the class teachers to complete forms I can write them easily myself, in consultation of course.”

There are nine classes in the school and Ms Burns supports SEN children in each one: “I like to make sure that I know the children. This might be a heavy time commitment and means there’s only around four hours left for administration, but it does actually cut down on the amount of admin that I need to do.”

“We have amazing and committed teachers who are also able to be open and honest. We know when to ask for help and when to take the initiative. We all know that special needs must be prioritised and we work together to make sure it is the case.”

**Support: SEN is a priority for all staff at St Mary Magdalen’s Primary School**

• **Suzanne O’Connell is a freelance education writer and a former primary school headteacher.**
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